



June 28, 2002

Mr. Steven M. Kean
Senior Assistant City Attorney
City of Tyler
P.O. Box 2039
Tyler, Texas 75710

OR2002-3527

Dear Mr. Kean:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 165098.

The City of Tyler (the "city") received a request for all commendations or reprimands of a named former police officer, documents pertaining to internal affairs investigations involving the officer, and internal letters, memoranda, or other communications regarding the resignation of the officer. You advise that responsive information maintained in the officer's personnel file maintained by the civil service director will be released. You claim that the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information deemed confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information protected by other statutes. You advise that the city is a civil service city under the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 of the Local Government Code contemplates two different types of personnel files: one that the police department is required to maintain as part of the officer's civil service file, and one that the police department may maintain for its own internal use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g).

Section 143.089(g) provides:

A fire or police department may maintain a personnel file on a fire fighter or police officer employed by the department for the department's use, but the department may not release any information contained in the department file to any agency or person requesting information relating to a fire fighter or police officer. The department shall refer to the director or the director's designee a person or agency that requests information that is maintained in the fire fighter's or police officer's personnel file.

In *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney General*, 851 S.W.2d 946 (Tex. App. – Austin 1993, writ denied), the court addressed a request for information contained in a police officer's personnel file maintained by the city police department for its use and addressed the applicability of section 143.089(g) to that file. The records included in the personnel file related to complaints against the police officer for which no disciplinary action was taken. The court determined that section 143.089(g) made these records confidential. *City of San Antonio*, 851 S.W.2d at 949; *see also City of San Antonio v. San Antonio Express-News*, 47 S.W.3d 556 (Tex. App. – San Antonio 2000, pet. denied) (information reasonably relating to officer's employment relationship with department and maintained in the department's internal file pursuant to section 143.098(g) is confidential). In cases in which a police department takes disciplinary action against a police officer, it is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place records relating to that investigation and disciplinary action in the personnel files maintained under section 143.089(a). Such records are subject to disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"). Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990).

You explain that the submitted information relates to the city police department's criminal and internal affairs investigations, and that there has been no disciplinary action that would require the city to place the information in the civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). As a result, the requested information is maintained only within the section 143.089(g) internal personnel files. Based on these representations and our review of the information, we conclude that the submitted records are confidential under section 552.101 of the Government Code and must not be disclosed. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your claim under section 552.108.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records;

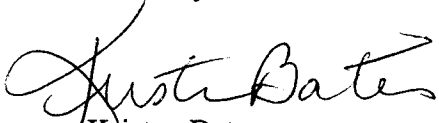
2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Kristen Bates
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAB/seg

Ref: ID# 165098

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Jacque Hilburn
Tyler Morning Telegraph
P.O. Box 2030
Tyler, Texas 75710
(w/o enclosures)